



YOUTH DAY (AGES 13–17) (ADDRESSING YOUTH VIOLENCE)

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Introduction

In Black churches there is a day (sometimes more than one) set aside for recognition of the lives of young people in the midst of congregations. Some churches hold a service closer to the end of the school year; that way, high school students who are graduating can receive commendation for their accomplishments as they are promoted to the young adult ministries of their congregation.

Some African Americans who are Roman Catholic celebrate *World Youth Day*, a tradition that began with Pope John Paul II in 1985.¹ Then 1985 was declared International Youth Year by the United Nations, and in that spirit, John Paul II, recognizing that young people are the hope of the world, began having the Catholic Church yearly celebrate World Youth Day.

II. Youth Champions

In the United States, one champion for youth has been Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). The CDF is an outgrowth of Wright Edelman's work with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign. It "has challenged the United States to raise its standards by improving policies and programs for children."² One of the traditions that CDF has begun, much like Youth Day in the Black Church, is the Children's Sabbath, a Sunday set apart annually to celebrate the presence of children in churches. The Children's Defense Fund also provides ecumenical worship resources for this occasion.

Dr. King realized the importance of having youth fully participate in all ministries of the church, even politics. During the Civil Rights Movement, there was a "Children's Crusade" in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. Teaching youth nonviolent politics was crucial to Dr. King Jr.'s ministry. In his speech "A Gift of Love" he stated, "The Freedom Movement has tried to bring a message to boys like Tex. First, we explained that violence can be put down by armed might and police work, that physical force can never solve the underlying social problems. Second, we promised them that we could prove, by example, that nonviolence works."³

Unfortunately, the predominate public face of Black churches in the public sphere has been adults with youth 'placed at the back of the bus.' Women and men of God have a duty to ensure the full participation of youth in the work of Black churches.

III. Information on Barriers to Helping Youth Love Their Enemies

Definitions

- **Cradle-to-Prison Pipeline**—National trend that impacts Black youth where society, rather than educating and nurturing them into loving and engaged citizens, works to criminalize them. The denial of educational opportunities is a key factor here, particularly for at-risk youth. Marginality and early deaths are the markers of this pipeline for African American young persons.
- **The Prison-Industrial-Complex (P-I-C)**—Considered by some to be one of the greatest barriers to progress in the African American community, the P-I-C is the "set of bureaucratic, economic, and political interests which encourage increased spending on incarceration."⁴ While the body of Christ teaches love of enemies and those who persecute us, the P-I-C targets black youth for the "cradle to prison pipeline" while teaching young people justice as vengeance.

For those unfamiliar with the political rhetoric concerning the Prison-Industrial Complex, if a political candidate promises to "get tough on crime," it usually means she/he plans to serve the private industries invested in the P-I-C. This law-and-order approach to an already flawed criminal justice system is applied by members of both major political parties.

- **Restorative Justice**—To define justice as restorative is to first and foremost acknowledge the image of God in both the victim and the victimizer. Justice as such is about restoring human dignity in both. Justice is used as a tool to transform the offender into someone who benefits her/himself, her/his communities, as well as society in general.⁵
- **Retributive Justice**—When what is right is seen as revenge in order to degrade the victimizer, this is retributive justice. Retributive justice and the Prison-Industrial-Complex go hand and hand. Retribution in the criminal justice system includes but not exclusively, capital punishment, harsh imprisonment sentences for drug sentences (without chances to go to rehabilitation first), and three-strikes-and-you're-out laws.

Some Facts & Statistics

- In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act granted \$17 billion in grants for police officers and state prison buildings as Federal Capital punishment was expanded to 16 new crimes.
- According to the Justice Policy Institute, 39% of African Americans were incarcerated, even though we made up only 12.9% of the population as of 2008.⁶
- In 2003, although African American youth make up 16% of the population of young people in the United States, they were 45% of those in juvenile detention. “While approximately 8.6% of public school children have been identified as having disabilities that impact their ability to learn, a recent survey of correctional facilities found that students with disabilities are represented in jail at a rate nearly four times that.”⁷

As we reflect on these grim numbers, they make us keenly aware that our society is not building on the precept of Christ Jesus found in passages such as Matthew 5:44-45, part of the Sermon on the Mount. The Prison-Industrial-Complex teaches young people in American society to respond to opponents with wrath. Black Churches as counter-cultural institutions, holding faithful to the Good News, must teach youth the value of loving their persecutors and how to avoid and navigate the maze of the Prison-Industrial-Complex.

Christianity is equipped to deal with the issue of youth violence because of our Savior who taught us in his ministry, death, and resurrection to love our enemies. We have also learned that violence only begets violence and that at some point the cycle of violence must be stopped if people are to co-exist as equals in communities. In African American Christian traditions, there is a great heritage of promoting nonviolence and the love of our enemies, whether it is the historic peace witness of Black Pentecostalism and the Progressive Baptists (with Dr. King) or the ministries of reconciliation from black Christian thinkers like Spencer Perkins and J. Deotis Roberts. Contrary to the messages handed to us by the Prison-Industrial-Complex, we recognize that we are all fallen in some way and that we are all redeemable. Further, we are clear that it is the Church's job to liberate persons and institutions from their fallen state because we believe in redemption.

IV. Audio Visual Aids

- To promote youth anti-violence, choose a color for all youth to wear during the worship service. Allow your youth to pick the color. Make it a bright color. They may also want to make wrist bands that they can wear at church or at school and in their community. The wrist bands should contain an anti-violence message.
- Place a cradle in the middle of your pulpit or in front of your church altar. Fill it with school supplies, and point to it while having a high-school senior do a brief essay on the Cradle-to-Prison pipeline.
- Place anti-violence posters, photographs, and other art (including wood carvings and statues) throughout your church on this Sunday and after. Make sure that youth are asked to contribute to this art display. Mention the art display in your church bulletin and list all contributors.

V. Illustrations

This Youth Sunday, take the time to use positive stories about African American role models who embody the values of loving their enemies to overcome adversity as well as racial and gender violence. The following are excerpts from a speech entitled “Your Time Is Now, My Sisters” by the late Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to the United States Congress. She had been in politics for nearly 20 years when she decided to become the first woman to run for the presidential nomination of a major political party in 1972. While she did not capture that nomination, she did captivate the hearts and minds of many, as she confronted the inhumane racist and sexist political sphere of her time just simply by affirming her own humanity. Chisholm’s story should be viewed as inspirational for black female and male youths.

Each—black male and black female, white male and white female—must escape first from their own intolerable trap before they can be fully effective in helping others to free themselves.

—Shirley Chisholm⁸

Whether it is intentional or not, when it becomes time for a high school girl to think about preparing for her career, her counselors, whether they be male or female, will think first of her so-called natural career—housewife and mother—and begin to program her for a field with which children and marriage should not unduly interfere. That’s exactly the same as the situation of the young black students who the racist counselor advises to prepare for service-oriented occupations, because he does not even think of them entering the professions.

—Shirley Chisholm⁸

VI. Books to Address Youth Violence

- Logan, James Samuel. Good Punishment?: Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 2008.
- Mitchell, David D. Black Theology and Youths at Risk. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001.
- Parker, Evelyn L. Trouble Don't Last Always: Emancipatory Hope among African American Adolescents. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003.

VII. National Organizations Devoted to Efforts That Decrease Youth Violence

CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement conducts, collects, and funds research on the civic and political participation of young Americans. CIRCLE is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy and is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and Carnegie Corporation of New York. Online location: www.civicyouth.org

Future 5000

Future 5000 is a tool to support the growth of a powerful and connected progressive youth movement. It's a dynamic directory of youth organizations working for justice across all 50 states. All of the 700+ organizations listed on Future5000.com have their own profile that describes their work in one of four Sectors of Youth Organizing: campus, community, civic engagement, and cultural. This search-able directory and networking site will help us visualize and organize our movement, people, activities, and resources across and within diverse kinds of youth organizing. Online location: www.future5000.com

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

INCITE! is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing. Online location: www.incite-national.org

Project South

Project South is a leadership development organization based in the U.S. South creating spaces for movement building. They work with communities pushed forward by the struggle to strengthen leadership and provide popular political and economic education for personal and social transformation. They build relationships with organizations and networks across the U.S. and global South to inform their local work and to engage in bottom-up movement building for social and economic justice. Online location: www.projectsouth.org

The Algebra Project

The Algebra Project is a national, nonprofit organization that uses mathematics as an organizing tool to ensure quality public school education for every child in America. They believe that every child has a right to a quality education to succeed in this technology-based society and to exercise full citizenship. They achieve this by using best educational research and practices and building coalitions to create systemic changes. Online location: <http://www.algebra.org>

The Blackout Arts Collective

The Blackout Arts Collective is a grassroots coalition of artists, activists, and educators working to empower communities of color through the arts. They use the tools of culture and education to raise awareness and catalyze action around the critical issues that impact their communities.

They believe in the power of the creative process to transform lives, mobilize communities, and build a more just society. They have various chapters throughout the states. Online location: www.blackoutartscollective.com

The Community Justice Network

The Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY) is a program of the W. Haywood Burns Institute. This program is comprised of community based programs, grassroots organizations, service providing agencies, residential facilities, and advocacy groups that focus their work on youth of color. The CJNY's primary function is to be a support network for organizers and practitioners who are on the ground working with youth who are at risk or already involved in the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Online location: www.cjny.org

The National Organization of Concerned Black Men

The website provides enrichment and prevention programs for African American children. The National Organization of Concerned Black Men Inc. (CBM) conducts "best practice" programs from the Nation's Capital. Online location: www.cbmnational.org

The Organization's programs include:

- *Peer Education and Reproductive Counseling (PERCY)*—A teenage pregnancy program that helps preteen and teenage boys abstain from premature sex and to make wise, responsible choices in their lives.
- *Educated Choices for Healthy Outcomes (ECHO)*—An HIV/AIDS prevention project that provides young people with information on the spread of HIV and AIDS in an effort to encourage them to make safe and healthy sexual choices.
- *Parent Self-Improvement Project*—A basic education program for low-income parents to provide them with skills that will improve their opportunities for job training and employment.
- *Substance Abuse Integration Project (SAP)*—A substance abuse prevention program that provides young people with information on the risks associated with drugs and addictive behavior. Because a substance abuser is more likely to take sexual risks, this program integrates a substance abuse prevention message into our PERCY and ECHO projects.
- *Saving Lives and Minds (SLAM)*—An academic performance program with a particular focus on skills tested on the Stanford 9. In addition to tutoring, the program emphasizes school attendance and attitude.

The Young People's Project

The Mission of the Young People's Project is to use Math Literacy as a tool to develop young leaders and organizers who radically change the quality of education and life in their

communities so that all children have the opportunity to reach their full human potential. Online location: www.typp.org

YouthBuild

YouthBuild is a youth and community development program that simultaneously addresses core issues facing low-income communities: housing, education, employment, crime prevention, and leadership development. In YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16–24 work toward their GEDs or high school diplomas, learn job skills, serve their communities by building affordable housing, and transform their own lives and roles in society. There are now 273 YouthBuild programs in 45 states, Washington, DC, and the Virgin Islands. 92,000 YouthBuild students have built 19,000 units of affordable, increasingly green, housing since 1994. Online location: www.youthbuild.org

Youth Impact Program

The Youth Impact Program’s mission is to make a positive and lasting impact on “at-risk” inner city boys nationwide and to grow their opportunities to be successful through academics, teamwork and mentoring. Online location: www.youthimpactprogram.org

VIII. Songs That Speak to the Moment

“Love Somebody” by Mandisa featuring Toby Mac is our first song for this unit. Mandisa’s Gospel message for the public started with her stint on American Idol. While the judges lauded her for her singing talent, Mandisa received much scrutiny for her weight and looks. “Love Somebody” is a response to Mandisa’s critics. The song talks about loving diversity, for it is in the image of the Triune God that we are all made. In an age of bullying, Facebook stalking, and more, these types of messages help lessen violence and should be promoted.

Love Somebody

I need a minute
Can we get some time
We both know we don’t see eye to eye

I know it’s hard on us when we disagree
But don’t you think that you and me could take a chance and

Love somebody
Somebody needs you

You could be the one to
Love somebody
Take a chance and pass it on

You could be the one to love

I had a dream just the other day

With blinded eyes we must let
Real love guide the way
Nobody felt we had to look the same or talk the game

We found true beauty and we weren't afraid to go ahead and
Love somebody
Somebody needs you
You could be the one to
Love somebody
Take a chance and pass it on
You could be the one to
Love somebody
Somebody needs you
You could be the one to love

If Mandisa ain't changed your mind
It oughta be flipped by the end of this rhyme
'Cause she gave me eight to flow and translate
Recalibrate end all debates
'Cause this bomb is about to drop y'all
DiVerse City just can't be stopped
So here we go, come check the show
Come one, come all, come overflow with love.⁹

“I Have A Dream” by Common featuring Will.I.Am which is from the movie The Freedom Writers is a song about hope for a better world, where black youths are not judged by how high they jump, or how their lives can be managed through the criminal justice system, but how they can look within themselves to transcend the expectations of this world. The songs says in part:

Hate has no color or age, flip the page,
Now my rage became freedom,
Writin' dreams in the dark, they far but I can see 'em,
I believe in Heaven more than Hell,
Blessings more than jail,
In the ghetto let love prevail

I Have a Dream

[Chorus:]

(I am happy...I Have a Dream) I got a Dream
(That One Day) We gonna work it out out out
(That One Day) We gonna work it out out out
(That One Day) We gonna work it out
(I Have a Dream) I got a Dream

(That One Day) We gonna work it out out out
(That One Day) We gonna work it out out out
(That One Day) We gonna work it out
(I Have a Dream) I got a Dream
(That One Day) That one day
(That One Day) I'm a look deep within myself
(I Have a Dream) I gotta find a way...
My Dream is to be free
My Dream is to be free
My Dream is to be free
My Dream is to be free.

[Verse 1:]

In search of brighter days, I ride through the maze of the madness,
Struggle is my address, where pain and crack lives,
Gunshots comin' from sounds of Blackness,
Given this game with no time to practice,
Born on the Black list, told I'm below average,
A life with no cabbage,
That's no money if you from where I'm from,
Funny, I just want some of your sun,
Dark clouds seem to follow me,
Alcohol that my pops swallowed bottled me,
No apology, I walk with a boulder on my shoulder,
It's a Cold War - I'm a colder soldier,
Hold the same fight that made Martin Luther the King,
I ain't usin' it for the right thing,
In between Lean and the fiends, hustle and the schemes,
I put together pieces of a Dream
I still have one

[Chorus]

[Verse 2:]

The world's seen me lookin' in the mirror,
Images of me, gettin' much clearer,
Dear Self, I wrote a letter just to better my soul,
If I don't express it then forever I'll hold, inside
I'm from a side where we out of control,
Rap music in the 'hood played a fatherly role,
My story's like yours, yo it gotta be told,
Tryna make it from a gangsta to a godlier role,
Read scrolls and stow slaves,
And Jewish people in cold cage,
Hate has no color or age, flip the page,

Now my rage became freedom,
Writin' dreams in the dark, they far but I can see 'em,
I believe in Heaven more than Hell,
Blessings more than jail,
In the ghetto let love prevail,
With a story to tell, my eyes see the glory and well,
The world waitin' for me to yell "I Have a Dream"

[Chorus]¹⁰

"Where Is the Love?" by The Black Eyed Peas is a pop song that was written in the context of the first year of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The United States at the same time was conducting its War on Terror, torturing suspects at Guantanamo Bay while providing a strong military presence in Afghanistan. While the Bush administration had the support of devout Christians, one had to ask if these war (violence) policies represented the God of love revealed in Scripture, loving enemies and having mercy. The Black Eyed Peas were asking these questions in this hit song. YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekOkAdc>

Where Is the Love?

What's wrong with the world, mama
People livin' like they ain't got no mamas
I think the whole world addicted to the drama
Only attracted to things that'll bring you trauma
Overseas, yeah, we try to stop terrorism
But we still got terrorists here livin'
In the USA, the big CIA fightin'
The Bloods and The Crips and the KKK
But if you only have love for your own race
Then you only leave space to discriminate
And to discriminate only generates hate
And when you hate then you're bound to get irate, yeah
Madness is what you demonstrate
And that's exactly how anger works and operates
Man, you gotta have love just to set it straight
Take control of your mind and meditate
Let your soul gravitate to the love, y'all, y'all

People killin', people dyin'
Children hurt and you hear them cryin'
Can you practice what you preach
And would you turn the other cheek

Father, Father, Father help us
Send some guidance from above

'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
Where is the love (Love)

Where is the love (The love)
Where is the love (The love)
Where is the love
The love, the love

It just ain't the same, always unchanged
New days are strange, is the world insane
If love and peace is so strong
Why are there pieces of love that don't belong
Nations droppin' bombs
Chemical gasses fillin' lungs of little ones
With ongoin' sufferin' as the youth die young
So ask yourself is the lovin' really gone
So I could ask myself really what is goin' wrong
In this world that we livin' in people keep on givin' in
Makin' wrong decisions, only visions of them dividends
Not respectin' each other, deny thy brother
A war is goin' on but the reason's undercover
The truth is kept secret, it's swept under the rug
If you never know truth then you never know love
Where's the love, y'all, come on (I don't know)
Where's the truth, y'all, come on (I don't know)
Where's the love, y'all

People killin', people dyin'
Children hurt and you hear them cryin'
Can you practice what you preach
And would you turn the other cheek

Father, Father, Father help us
Send some guidance from above
'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
Where is the love (Love)

Where is the love (The love)
Where is the love, the love, the love?

I feel the weight of the world on my shoulder
As I'm gettin' older, y'all, people gets colder
Most of us only care about money makin'

Selfishness got us followin' our wrong direction
Wrong information always shown by the media
Negative images is the main criteria
Infecting the young minds faster than bacteria
Kids wanna act like what they see in the cinema
Yo', whatever happened to the values of humanity
Whatever happened to the fairness in equality
Instead of spreading love we're spreading animosity
Lack of understanding, leading lives away from unity
That's the reason why sometimes I'm feelin' under
That's the reason why sometimes I'm feelin' down
There's no wonder why sometimes I'm feelin' under
Gotta keep my faith alive till love is found
Now ask yourself

Where is the love?
Where is the love?
Where is the love?
Where is the love?

Father, Father, Father help us
Send some guidance from above
'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
Where is the love?

Sing wit me y'all:
One world, one world (We only got)
One world, one world (That's all we got)
One world, one world
And something's wrong wit it (Yeah)
Something's wrong wit it (Yeah)
Something's wrong wit the wo-wo-world, yeah
We only got
(One world, one world)
That's all we got
(One world, one world)¹¹

Notes

1. World Youth Day Founding Documents:
http://www.vatican.va/gmg/documents/gmg_docs_en.html
2. Children's Defense Fund "Our History Page": <http://www.childrensdefense.org/about-us/our-history/>
3. Martin Luther King, Jr. "A Gift of Love" in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings

and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1990. pp. 62–63.

4. Logan, James Samuel. Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008. p. 4.

5. Ibid., p. 143.

6. Justice Policy Institute: <http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/category/36>

7. American Civil Liberties Union Racial Justice information: <http://www.aclu.org/racial-justice/school-prison-pipeline-talking-points>

8. Chisholm, Shirley. “Your Time Is Now, My Sisters” in The Columbia Documentary History of American Women Since 1941. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. pp. 219–222.

9. Mandisa featuring Toby Mac. “Love Somebody.” True Beauty. Nashville, TN: Sparrow Records, 2007.

10. Common featuring Will.I.Am. “I Have a Dream.” Freedom Writers Soundtrack. Burbank, CA: Hollywood Records, 2007.

11. Black Eyed Peas. “Where Is the Love?” Elephunk. Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Geffen (A&M) Records.